

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04 SIL-01 IO-13 DHA-02
OMB-01 TRSE-00 AID-05 IGA-02 NEAE-00 EUR-12 EA-07
/111 W

-----221652Z 040902 /41

P 221331Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2047

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 4049

FOLG SENT ACTION DELHI INFO BOMBAY MADRAS DTD MAR 22
RPTD FOR YOUR INFO.

QUOTE.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 CALCUTTA 0699

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJ: WEST BENGAL AFTER THE ELECTIONS

1. SUMMARY: THE CPM AND ITS SMALL LEFT ALLIES - HAVING
TAKEN ALMOST 55 PERCENT OF THIS STATE'S LOK SABHA SEATS -
ARE THE BIG WINNERS IN LAST WEEK'S ELECTIONS IN WEST BENGAL.
FEELING ITSELF ON THE CREST OF A WAVE - AND DEEPLY RESENT-
FUL OVER WHAT CONGRESS DID TO IT IN THE 1972 STATE ELECTIONS
AND SINCE THEN - THE CPM IS NOW DEMANDING THE IMMEDIATE
RESIGNATION OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT AND THE CALLING OF
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS. SOME IN THE JANATA/CFD FEAR
THAT THIS WOULD LEAD TO A CPM GOVERNMENT IN WEST BENGAL,
AND THEY WANT TO STALL; BUT THEY ARE CAUGHT BETWEEN THIS
BOOGEY AND THE DESIRE TO HAVE A STATE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
THAT WILL SUPPORT THE NEW GOI CABINET'S CHOICE FOR THE
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PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS THIS SUMMER. HOW ENERGETICALLY THE
CPM PUSHES ITS DEMANDS WILL PROBABLY DETERMINE WHETHER -
OR WHEN - THERE WILL BE VIOLENCE HERE. WITH ONLY A LITTLE
BAD LUCK THINGS COULD GET QUITE NASTY IN WEST BENGAL LATER
THIS SPRING AND IN THE SUMMER. END SUMMARY.

2. CALCUTTA WAS QUIET YESTERDAY IN ITS FIRST 24 HOURS OF

THE POST-EMERGENCY ERA. THERE SEEMED FEWER PEOPLE ON THE STREETS THAN USUAL - SOME STAYED AWAY FROM WORK - AND THOSE WHO WERE OUT GATHERED IN SMALL GROUPS, OBVIOUSLY GOING OVER THE ELECTION RESULTS. THE POLICE ALREADY SEEMED A LITTLE LESS SURE OF THEMSELVES AND TRAFFIC A BIT MORE UNRULY. VIRTUALLY EVERYONE - CONGRESSWELLAS, OPPOSITION AND GENERAL PUBLIC - IS ASTOUNDED BY THE EXTENT OF THE JANATA/CFD/CPM VICTORY AND THE CONGRESS DEFEAT. THOSE WHO A FEW DAYS AGO TOOK THE DIMMEST VIEW OF CONGRESS' PROSPECTS IN WEST BENGAL WERE SURE IT WOULD WIN FIVE TO SEVEN SEATS EVEN WITHOUT THE BENEFIT OF OFFICIAL SUPPORT, MONEY AND STRONG-ARM TACTICS; WHEN THESE ADDED ADVANTAGES WERE CALCULATED, THE PESSIMISTS FORECAST 12 TO FIFTEEN AND THE OPTIMISTS 18 TO 22. IN THE TALLYING THUS FAR CONGRESS HAS WON ONLY ONE SEAT (IN BURDWAN, AGAINST A CPM CANDIDATE) AND IS AHEAD IN ONLY ONE OTHER. THE STATE-WIDE COUNT SEEMS ALMOST CERTAIN TO BE JANATA/CFD/CPM AND LEFT ALLIES 40, CONGRESS TWO.

3. RECRIMINATION HAS ALREADY BEGUN IN CONGRESS RANKS. CHIEF MINISTER RAY'S SUPPORTERS (MAINLY THE LEFT WING OF THE PARTY) BLAME THE "PRO-CHANGERS" IN THE WEST BENGAL CONGRESS, THE CENTER AND RIGHT GROUP THAT SUPPORTED SANJAY GANDHI IN LAST FALL'S BATTLES TO OUST RAY. THE SANJAY GROUP (THEY NO LONGER CALL THEMSELVES THAT) BLAMES RAY, THE PARTY'S LEFTISTS AND THE ELECTORAL ALLIANCE WITH THE CPI. IN THEIR OWN WAYS BOTH ARE RIGHT; INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES AND MONEY FROM THE SANJAY GROUP WEAKENED THE RAY GROUP'S CANDIDATES, AND THE DENIAL OF NOMINATIONS TO REPRESENTATIVES OF POWERFUL STATE

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CONGRESS CONSERVATIVE BLOC LEADERS - NOTABLY TARUN KANTI GHOSH - PROBABLY ASSURED THE OPPOSITION VICTORY IN TWO OR THREE CONSTITUENCIES. AS THESE BITTER CHARGES ARE EXCHANGED, EACH SIDE TALKS OF RESHUFFLING THE STATE CABINET TO OUST ITS RIVALS.

4. THE FATE OF THE STATE CABINET IS THE NEXT ORDER OF BUSINESS HERE. IT HAS RUN ITS REGULAR FIVE YEAR TERM (ELECTIONS TO THE WEST BENGAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY WERE LAST HELD IN MARCH 1972) BUT WAS EXTENDED FOR ANOTHER YEAR BY THE GOI IN THE FALL OF 1976. CHIEF MINISTER RAY HAS ALREADY BEGUN BUILDING HIS DEFENSES ON THIS LEGAL FOUNDATION; ON MARCH 21 RAY TOLD THE PRESS THAT "TALK OF DISSOLUTION OF STATE ASSEMBLIES AND REMOVAL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS AFTER THE LOK SABHA ELECTIONS WAS WITHOUT ANY LEGAL, CONSTITUTIONAL OR FACTUAL BASIS" AND THAT THE PRESENT WEST BENGAL GOVERNMENT WOULD CONTINUE IN OFFICE UNTIL MARCH 1978. RAY ASSURED NEWSPAPERMEN - IN RESPONSE TO THEIR QUESTIONS - THAT A NON-CONGRESS GOVERNMENT AT THE CENTER WOULD NOT AFFECT

THE EXISTENCE OF A CONGRESS CABINET IN THE STATE AND DENIED
THAT THERE WOULD BE DEFECTIONS FROM HIS CABINET OR FROM
THE RANKS OF CONGRESS MLAS.

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2048

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 NEW DELHI 4049

5. RAY'S POSITION RESTS MAINLY ON BRAVADO AND BLUFF, AND
PROBABLY ON THE CALCULATION THAT IT WILL GET SUPPORT FROM
SOME ELEMENTS OF THE WEST BENGAL JANATA AND CFD, THOSE WHO
FEAR A CPM SWEEP OF THE STATE. FOR IT IS THE CPM AND ITS
TWO SMALL LEFT ALLIES, THE FORWARD BLOC AND THE RSP, WHO
ARE THE REALLY BIG WINNERS IN THE LOK SABHA ELECTIONS. THEY
APPEAR TO HAVE TAKEN 24 OF THE STATE'S 42 LOK SABHA SEATS.
THE CPM'S FIRST ACTION AFTER THE ELECTION RETURNS BEGAN
COMING IN WAS TO DEMAND THE IMMEDIATE RESIGNATION OF THE
CONGRESS GOVERNMENT IN WEST BENGAL AND THE HOLDING OF STATE
ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS. THE CPM HAS MANY A GRUDGE TO SETTLE
WITH THE WEST BENGAL CONGRESS. IT MAINTAINS THAT ITS ROUT (17
SEATS OUT OF 281) IN THE STATE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELEC-
TIONS OF 1972 WAS THE RESULT OF CONGRESS RIGGING AND STRONG-
ARM METHODS; AND MANY OF ITS WORKERS AND SOME OF ITS LEADERS
HAVE SUFFERED IMPRISONMENT EITHER CONTINUOUSLY OR PERIODICALLY
SINCE CONGRESS CAME TO POWER IN THE STATE IN 1971/1972. THE
CPM EVIDENTLY FEELS IT NOW HAS THE STRENGTH TO SWEEP STATE
ELECTIONS AND COME IN AT THE HEAD OF A NEW STATE CABINET.

6. THIS IS A DEEPLY DISQUIETING PROSPECT TO MANY STATE
JANATA/CFD LEADERS, AND OF COURSE TO MANY OF THE MIDDLE
CLASS VOTERS - BENGALI AND NON-BENGALI - WHO GAVE THE
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OPPOSITION ITS LANDSLIDE VICTORY. BUT WITH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS COMING UP THIS SUMMER, THE JANATA AND CFD WILL BE CAUGHT BETWEEN THEIR FEAR OF THE POSSIBILITY OF A CPM GOVERNMENT'S COMING TO POWER IF ELECTIONS ARE HELD AND THE DESIRE TO HAVE A STATE LEGISLATURE IN WEST BENGAL THAT WILL SUPPORT WHOMEVER THE NEW GOI CHOOSES FOR THE PRESIDENCY. IN OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES THE ALTERNATIVE MIGHT BE TO RELY ON DEFECTIONS FROM CONGRESS RANKS, BUT CONGRESS O'S BASE IN THE CURRENT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY - THREE SEATS - IS TOO SMALL FOR THIS; IF ACCEPTED IN NUMBERS SUBSTANTIAL ENOUGH TO MATTER, THE DEFECTORS WOULD ABSORB IT.

7. THE QUESTION THEN IS HOW FAST AND HOW ENERGETICALLY THE CPM WILL PUSH ITS DEMANDS. RIGHT NOW, IN THE FIRST FLUSH OF VICTORY, THE CPM IS MERELY STATING ITS CASE, BEHAVING QUITE CIVILLY. MOST PEOPLE THINK IT WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO FOR AT LEAST THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS BUT BEYOND THAT THERE IS MUCH UNCERTAINTY. DEFEATED IN KERALA, THE CPM MAY NO LONGER BE VERY IMPORTANT ON THE NATIONAL SCENE, BUT IT HOLDS THE COMMANDING WORD IN THE POLITICS OF THIS STATE. ONLY A VERY STRONG SHOW OF UNITY AND DETERMINATION BY THE JANATA/CFD COMBINATION AT THE CENTER IS LIKELY TO DETER THE CPM FROM INSISTING ON EARLY ELECTIONS IN WEST BENGAL AND FROM MAKING A BID FOR POWER HERE.

8. THE CITY AND THE STATE ARE QUITE PEACEFUL NOW BUT THE WEEKS AHEAD COULD BRING SUDDEN CHANGES. WITH ONLY A LITTLE BAD LUCK, THINGS COULD GET VERY NASTY HERE. BIG BUSINESS IS ALREADY DEEPLY APPREHENSIVE OVER LABOUR UNREST, AND RIGHTLY SO; WAGE CUTTING AND LOCK OUTS BY MANAGEMENT WERE THE MAIN ISSUE IN INDUSTRIAL AREAS, ACCOUNTING FOR THE LARGE MAJORITIES PILED UP BY SOME OF THE CPM CANDIDATES. UNLESS THERE IS A STRONG CENTER - OR EVEN WITH ONE - THE CPM COULD EASILY TURN LABOR UNREST TO VIOLENCE IF ITS DEMAND FOR EARLY STATE ELECTIONS IS DENIED.

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Message Attributes

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